

Vice-Eerste Minister en  
Minister van Werk, Economie en  
Consumenten, Belast met  
Buitenlandse Handel



Vice-Premier Ministre et  
Ministre de l'Emploi, de l'Economie et  
des Consommateurs, Chargé du  
Commerce Extérieur

**TOESPRAAK DOOR KRIS PEETERS**  
**VICE-EERSTE MINISTER EN**  
**MINISTER VAN WERK, ECONOMIE, CONSUMENTENZAKEN,**  
**BELAST MET BUITENLANDSE HANDEL**

**China Council for the Promotion of International Trade**

**1 juni 2017**

Mr. Chairman of the China Council for the  
Promotion of International Trade,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

Yesterday you celebrated the Duanwu or the  
Dragon Boat festival as we know it here in the  
West. I am not sure the Belgian Chinese Chamber  
of Commerce has been able to prepare the  
typical sticky rice zongzi that accompagnies  
this holiday. But in any case, we will do our  
very best to try and make you feel at home. And  
of course, I thank the Belgian Chinese Chamber  
of Commerce for organizing this event.

Belgium indeed welcomes you with open arms. In a world where more and more key players seem to want to shut doors, we want to open them even more.

We are only the 1<sup>st</sup> of June today but we can already say that 2017 is a very eventful year. On 20 January Donald Trump became the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States. From day 1 he has made it clear he would break with the longstanding American tradition of championing free market policies. Two months later, at the end of March, the United Kingdom triggered the so-called article 50 procedure, marking the start of the UK's Brexit negotiations in view of its departure from the European Union.

These two significant developments seem to indicate that some important countries are indeed shutting doors. They are moving away from key elements that guaranteed our prosperity in the past decades. They distance themselves from the globalized economy based on free trade and international cooperation.

I personally believe this is a mistake. It is an illusion to think we can hide behind physical, political or regulatory walls. It is a giant step back to withdraw behind high trade tariffs. No, what we need is transparency and an open business environment that allows companies to operate on the basis of fair rules and regulations.

Belgium offers such an environment to foreign companies. We welcome foreign companies with open arms. We take away obstacles for trade instead of creating new ones that make it more difficult for the international business community to visit their partners here. Moreover, we continue to invest in business friendly policies.

We are lowering employer contributions and personal income tax at unprecedented rates. This gives us a crucial competitiveness boost and it increases purchasing power. At the same time, our social policies have generated high welfare, which creates an interesting market for any company.

At the same time, a Chinese company setting up business in Belgium will not see its market limited to Belgium alone. As you know, we are in the very center of Europe. 60% of the EU's consumers are in a 500km radius around us.

So yes, ladies and gentlemen, Belgium is more than ever open for business. The many foreign investments, including from China, show that Belgium promotes fair and free international trade. Earlier this morning you received a presentation about the many advantages of Belgium's business environment. Advantages we've had for a very long time, but that have maybe become more clear now that other nations choose a different path.

We are already witnessing the consequences of that clarity. Lloyd's, the world's specialist insurance market, is preparing to set up its European hub right here in Brussels. And we know for a fact that many more are following in their footsteps.

I hope that there will also be Chinese companies who take this decision. Because this is the right time for such a move. About two weeks ago I attended the One Belt One Road Forum in Beijing. One Belt One Road is all about linking Europe and Asia.

During my stay in China, I witnessed the departure of the first train filled with Volvo/Geely cars from the Chinese city of Daqing. This train will arrive in a few days in the Belgian port of Zeebrugge. Concrete projects like that facilitate trade flows between China and Belgium. They are making One Belt One Road a success.

This will certainly also be on the agenda of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang. He is in Belgium right now to discuss trade and other opportunities that will further strengthen the ties between Belgium and China. At the same time, it is great to see that he is accompanied by so many important Chinese entrepreneurs. Because indeed, it is finally up to you to make use of these opportunities.

I can assure you that Belgium remains a trusted and welcoming partner to our friends from China. I can assure you that investing in Belgium means investing in a prosperous future.

I thank you.

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